

'Ashton Tower' Has a Long, Distinguished History



By N. LA VERL CHRISTENSEN
Editor Emeritus

If you're new in Provo you might wonder about the brick smokestack near the heart of the city with "Ashton's Chevrolet Buick" inscribed in larger vertical letters.

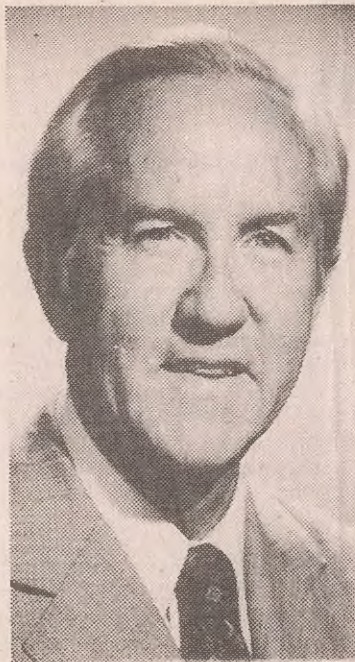
The smokeless stack is a vestige from the historic Woolen Mills, once Provo's largest industry which operated for 60 years on the First West-Second West block between First and Second North. But in modern times it was the symbol of another business institution — the P. E. Ashton Company — which also made history on the block.

For most of the 40 years that Preston E. (Pete) Ashton owned and managed this automotive firm, it was located on the Woolen Mills site. Ashton purchased about three-fourths of the block from Monte Young in the early forties, moving from his original location at University Avenue and Second South.

He sold the business several years ago but still owns the property, now the home of Ed Higgins Chevrolet-Buick, Inc.

Pete Ashton's rise to success was in the best tradition of a Horatio Alger legend. While achieving his business and economic goals he also served the community and state energetically as a review of his leadership positions testifies.

He served as president of these organizations: Provo Chamber of Commerce, Provo Rotary Club, Radar Club (predecessor to Riverside Country Club), Utah State Automobile Association, Timpanogos Golf Association and Utah County Automobile Association. He was also, member of the



P.E. Ashton

Utah Liquor Commission for five years; chairman of the Provo Fourth of July celebration and of a Red Cross fund drive; board member, Utah Valley Hospital; and member of the first Olympics for Utah Committee, the Brigham Young University Athletic Council and of Four Seasons whose successor seeks to develop a mountain ski resort east of Provo.

Ashton continues as one of Provo's senior businessmen with his own investment company for managing his 14 office, warehouse and apartment buildings occupied by 33 tenants.

He welcomes the more relaxed life but likes to reminisce about those "18-hour days" he sometimes used to work, noting the truth of the witticism, "The har-

der I worked the luckier I was."

There's more time now to be with Eleanor (Ellie), Pete's wife and business associate. They travel a lot. This year they enjoyed taking the paddle wheel boat "Mississippi Queen" at New Orleans and sight-seeing by auto along the Gulf Coast. Egypt and the Nile River were travel highlights in 1983; China the previous year.

Eleanor has made her own mark in the community, especially as a member and president of the Provo Library Board and president and long-time leader in the Girl Scout organization.

"She has been an excellent adviser in our business," says Pete, who also credits her insistence on saving as a factor in their success story. "Sometimes the key thing isn't so much what you make as what you save."

The couple's two sons both live in Salt Lake City. John Peter is an attorney. Patrick is pursuing a business career.

There were hallmarks to remember from Pete Ashton's career in the automobile business, including numerous awards. In 1974 he was one of only 57 in the nation to receive the prestigious *Time Magazine* Quality Dealer Award.

During a good business year the Ashton Company sold an average of 300 new and used cars per month. At its height, the firm had 70 employees. Pete took pride in helping his staff members develop their abilities. "Many of them became auto dealers themselves."

To mention three awards Ashton received for public service: A citation for support of school districts in driver education; the Minute Man Award of the Honor-

ary Colonels of the Utah National Guard; and in 1973, a major award from the Provo Chamber of Commerce "for outstanding contributions to the community" with prime focus on his leadership in downtown parking development.

Both Pete and Ellie are golfers. He negotiated purchases of land to enlarge the Riverside Country Club's course from 9 to 18 holes and had a similar role in expanding the Timpanogos course.

As one of their hobbies, the Ashtons enjoy growing orchids, camellias and geraniums as well as plants for their garden, in their own greenhouse.

The Pete Ashton story began in Salt Lake City where he was born in 1906, the last child in a family of 11. His father died when he was four.

As a boy he had a milk route, worked in a lumberyard and learned about cars working in his brother's garage.

In high school, college and later he sold cars — Hupmobiles, Cords, Pierce Arrows and Studebakers as well as some of those popular today. This paved the way toward his career in the auto industry.

Most of Pete's college was at University of Utah, with a short stint at New York University. He met Eleanor Lowe at a fraternity party at the old Geneva Resort on Utah Lake while both were attending the U. They were married in 1936.

About that time Pete and Jerry Cannon organized the Cannon Ashton Company which later was dissolved. The Ashtons moved to Provo in 1938 after Pete obtained the Chevrolet franchise here.

There were tough times early in the Provo period. Wartime con-

struction of Geneva Works helped reverse that situation. Population growth spurred the demand for cars — new, used and leased. The P. E. Ashton Company gained momentum which continued through the years.

After Ashton bought the Provo Woolen Mills property, he remodeled existing buildings as needed and later built new offices and salesroom.

(The mills had operated from 1872 to 1932 — after about 1910 as the Knight Woolen Mills, reincorporated by Jesse Knight and other interests. Despite valiant efforts, the industry never reached its former heights after a disastrous fire July 30, 1918).

Many old-timers will recall, with Pete and Ellie, a small brick structure that still stood on the block facing First West when Ashton took over the property. It had been built in 1867 as a courthouse and jail and was used five years for that purpose before being purchased by the Woolen Mills for warehouse use.

Historian J. M. Jensen related that the little courthouse-jail was a scene in early days of the trial and execution of one Chauncey W. Millard, a young stranger who had murdered two herders north of Utah Lake.

Wrote Jensen: "The execution took place Jan. 26, 1869. It was a public one, the first affair of its kind in the county, and the courthouse square was filled with curious sight-seers."

That was a bit of Provo history even preceding the Woolen Mills. The entire story of the block will always be a source of fascination for the Ashtons. Particularly satisfying will be the chapter they wrote by their own vision, hard work and leadership.

Ashton Tower is familiar part of landscape.

Pro-UTA Group Organizes In Bid to Counter Criticisms

By VICKI BARKER
Herald Staff Writer

Criticisms of the Utah Transit Authority triggered creation of a pro-UTA group in July and more aggressive informational efforts out of local UTA headquarters.

The UTA and the Timpanogos Transit Authority board hope voters in the Aug. 21 primary election will approve a UTA/TTA merger and a quarter-percent sales tax increase to fund Provo-Orem bus service.

This month residents will receive brochures explaining the proposition in the mail, said UTA Operations Director John English.

A group called Citizens for Public Transit formed in July to counter criticisms of the UTA, TTA and proposed annexation. Friday some members of the TTA met with the pro-transit group to discuss negative developments in the transit issue.

They were particularly concerned about criticisms from Rep. Samuel S. Taylor, D-Salt Lake, and Provoan Kim Shinkoskey.

TTA Secretary Mary Fakler says Shinkoskey's arguments are "all assumptions," and several charges are not only untrue but damaging. "He didn't have any facts," she said.

In an interview, Fakler and English refuted several statements Shinkoskey made in two public meetings and in a 4-page written submission to the Provo City Council and UTA Board of Directors. English also put into

some commuter buses are always packed, on some routes 25-30 people disembark and others get on — sometimes within a mile or less — and some lines, for example along State St., have a 250-passenger turnover

independent system — which would be at least 4-5 years — several million dollars in matching federal funds would already have gone down the drain. Those funds could be used in a UTA/TTA merger to

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during a single trip. Some routes, such as in The Avenues of Salt Lake City, serve four to six passengers per mile.

Averaging ridership of the 350 buses in the system, including those that carry suburban dwellers long distances and inner-city buses that carry a high turnover of passengers short distances, gives the low figure Taylor cites, English said. It should be qualified or it gives the impression few people ride the buses, he said.

Shinkoskey says the TTA rushed plans for a Provo-Orem transit system and prematurely voted on the merger proposal, considering no alternatives. He said the TTA needed more study and based its actions on out-

build the Timp area fleet from 20 buses in 1985 to 40 by 1990.

A legislation specialist at UTA, LeAnn Black points out that the amount of time required to accumulate sales taxes to match federal assistance "would be significant.

"You need 50 percent match for operating assistance and the match for capital assistance is 80/20," she said.

She also noted that the White House the past few years cut back on assistance in small percentages and the UTA expects cutbacks to continue.

Additionally, recent legislation changed the formula for federal assistance and could mean funds to Utah Valley could be drastically cut if no

under 200,000 population, service miles are not part of the formula. But once the Timp population reaches that density, showing few if any service miles covered would mean only "a very small amount" of assistance would come from the federal government, Black said.

The UTA currently estimates the Timp district population at 190,000, Black said. She said it is reasonable to expect the population at 200,000 within two to three years.

The TTA believes voters would rather have immediate service under the UTA rather than pay taxes for years while waiting for an independent TTA to build up.

English denies any suggestion the UTA is leading the TTA by the nose into annexation. The fact is the TTA asked to join the UTA.

Voters created the Timp transit authority in 1978, and the UTA has consulted with them on projects since then; prior to that with the Mountainland Association of Governments on transit studies, English pointed out.

"We've always been studying in the wings and offering to help whether they (TTA) joined us or not," English said. "In spite of anything said, we never tried to twist their arm to join us."

Studies done in the early 1970s, 1973, 1974 and 1981 all demonstrated the need and desire for mass transit in Provo-Orem, English said.

Vandals Damage Tomato Field

VANDALISM — The owner of a tomato field at 1200 N. 500 W., Orem, complained to police Thursday afternoon that juveniles caused about \$400 in damages to the crop by riding their bikes in the field and pulling up stakes with which they pounded the plants. The vandalism occurred Monday and Wednesday.

• Orem police Thursday evening recovered a bullet from molding at the top of the windshield of a car apparently vandalized by someone in the backyard of a residence at 734 S. 590 E. Damages to the car's hood, vinyl roof and windshield from the .22-caliber rifle firing were estimated at \$600.

INDECENT EXPOSURE — A motorist in a bluish-green Grandville with a black vinyl top exposed himself to another driver, a woman, as she drove along Interstate 15 near 1200 S., Orem. She reported the incident to police Thursday at about 1:45 p.m. and said the license number of the suspect vehicle is RWD333.

BURGLARY — An apartment dweller on N. Monterey Dr. in

Orem reported suspicion to police Wednesday night that her apartment was burglarized after she discovered an access through the attic open. Police suspect four males who live in the next-door apartment.

Police Beat

THEFT — Orem police charged two Pleasant Grove teenagers with theft Thursday morning after an officer discovered one had two wallets containing \$400 in twenty-dollar bills, and the other had two weapons concealed. The patrolman stopped the 14-year-olds walking near 400 N. Geneva Rd. because it was after curfew. They said they were going to Pleasant Grove. One said he had his father's wallet, and the father said he did not know his wallet was gone. Apparently the youth got the money from a night teller. They said they planned to use the money to go to Washington.

Bond Reserve Monies Will Soon Be Available

By NANCY BRINGHURST
Herald Staff Writer

Over \$2.3 million currently held in a bond reserve fund by Provo City will be available for

the money be used for approved capital expenditures within a certain time frame."

A priority list of capital expenditures for the \$2.3 million includes such projects as district housing